

Media Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H140**

OCR Report to Centres

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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G321 Foundation Portfolio

Introduction

Administration

Most centres sent their work on time, though as in previous series, there were some very late submissions. Centres with ten or fewer candidates are reminded that they should not wait for a sample request and should send all their work to the moderator by 15 May. Most centres are now putting work online, which has drastically reduced the size of packaging. Despite requests in all previous reports, there are still many centres with no central blog hub – this forces moderators to type individual URLs manually for each candidate. Often these URLs have been handwritten and contain errors, making the process unnecessarily lengthy. In some cases, moderators are being sent unnecessary passwords, taking them into user's Google accounts. Google docs in general should be avoided as they can be very slow to access and download. Centres are asked to keep the process as simple as possible. There are plenty of models of good practice at: <http://ocrmediastudies.weebly.com/index.html>

The best centres not only set up a blog hub containing the name and candidate numbers of those in the sample, but also ensured each blog featured the completed construction (e.g. film opening or magazine pages) at the top followed by clearly signposted responses to evaluation questions. There were a number of poorly organised blogs that made it necessary to search for the final construction work and/or spend time working out which evaluation question was being addressed. Indeed, many candidates failed to label the evaluation questions so it was not always clear what they were answering.

Many blogs were well organised with tags for each section, making navigation very easy. Some candidates submitted general media blogs, so the coursework was mixed in with class notes and essays for the exam unit, which is to be discouraged. School VLEs, with password access, tend to give much less flexibility than platforms like Blogger and Wordpress and can be very cumbersome in terms of downloading documents. This was sometimes also the case with candidates using Wix and Weebly. Online material should be embedded wherever possible. Most centres provided detailed commentary on each candidate's work, although some centres simply quoted lines from the marking criteria. It is good practice to identify how marks have been awarded across groups, with roles made explicit and the names and candidate numbers of those in each group clearly identified.

A few centres sent many different discs, memory cards and USBs; centres are advised that for digital submission only online and disks should be used and that one disk for the whole cohort is preferred to multiple disks for moderation. USBs are not acceptable and will be returned unopened in future, as some moderators reported viruses were carried in this way. In some cases, there were still formatting problems, with Publisher and Photoshop files submitted. All work should be supplied in universal formats such as JPEG or PDF

There were a number of clerical errors; centres should take care with the addition of marks and transferring marks between coversheets and MS1s. Few centres where candidates were resubmitting made the moderator aware of the changes that had been made to the first submission. This is an expectation in such instances. There were still some centres which failed to send preliminary tasks to moderators.

Overall, most centres have embraced the specification, understood the requirements for both research and planning and evaluations and produced construction work of a good standard. A minority of centres seem to be unfamiliar with key aspects of the specification such as the need to submit the evaluations electronically and the need to provide evidence for research and planning. New centres should keep referring to the specification throughout their coursework production time to ensure they are following the set briefs and guidance.

Some centres looked to have taken advice from last year's report and the OCR website and online community. However, there were still a high number of centres that had to have marks adjusted to bring them into line with the national standard. It is vital that the advice given by moderators in centre reports is acted upon in subsequent series, otherwise it is likely that marks will continue to be adjusted year on year.

Research and Planning

The best centres encouraged an equal measure of research and planning and advised candidates to see this as an ongoing process, representing the journey of the project. In some cases, there was an imbalance, with lots of research and little planning, or vice versa.

In the planning, most of the centres that had undertaken the video brief produced storyboards, and scripts together with other materials. There was good evidence of candidates reflecting on the process of the production in their blogs.

Research and planning was predominantly presented in blogs but the quality of these varied greatly. The best work was able to exploit the form properly: lots of embedded video/audio and annotated images, making the use of ICT integral to the presentation, rather than using images as part of an illustrated essay. The best work showed a real sense of progression from both the preliminary task and the research and planning through to the finished production.

Some centres gave identical marks to all group members and did not acknowledge the work that individuals had contributed to their groups.

Blogs were very varied, ranging from 206 posts to just one. Expectations are that candidates will keep an ongoing record of their progress and should not see this as something to be collated and uploaded at the last minute. In some cases, everything appeared to have been produced after production, at the start of May. Group blogs need to ensure that individual contributions are made clear. For level 4 research and planning, substantial evidence is expected.

Generally research into opening titles was weak, and for the magazine task research into contents pages was particularly poor or not enough attention was paid to the conventions. Candidates need to understand that research is not a 'bolt-on' but a fundamental element of their project.

Candidates did particularly well when they did audience research at every stage and utilised the results. Unfortunately some centres ensured that candidates did audience research but did not use the result to inform their own final productions. There was some excellent evidence of audience research utilising a range of methods and reflecting upon findings, particularly using video interviews. However, in some instances research was merely a series of questionnaires and graphs with minimal discussion of potential impact. As in previous years, paper-based research often comprised piles of questionnaires, which are very difficult to credit in any way and thus should be avoided. Only a copy of the blank questionnaire and a summary of the questionnaire results needs to be submitted – not each individual questionnaire.

Research is often still quite limited to one magazine, one film, one website or one radio show – more variety is clearly needed. Such research does, however, need to be relevant. Often there was voluminous analysis of texts which bore no relation to the eventual production, so that it was difficult to see what value it had for the project. Overall, there often seems little application of research findings in the final product. Print candidates tended to focus too much on generic magazines and a broad range of music magazines. It would be helpful if candidates focused on their chosen genre in order to aid their understanding of the specific conventions and what audiences associated with this sub genre.

In many cases, there was still too much reliance on essay-style work. Where candidates made use of free online technology to analyse existing products, this was often far more illuminating for their work.

Some centres are still relying on PowerPoint for research and planning. It is clear that as a summative tool, it is difficult to adapt PowerPoint for such formative work. Likewise, on the whole, paper based work does not maximize achievement in this area.

Film had some excellent use of test shots and location scouting across samples, including one group who did an excellent foley sound experiment with melons and chicken thighs!

The main issue in research and planning was inconsistency in centres ensuring each candidate offered a 'sense of journey' through the project. While some candidates did this well, many blogs contained little information on the post-production stage, usually petering out after listing details of actors, props and locations. References to improving skills in the use of software in both the film and print options were often omitted. Although this is partially addressed in one of the evaluation questions, there was often little reference to difficulties encountered in editing and changes made following feedback.

For Print work, too often there was little evidence of photo shoots and evidence of the selection of the images. Font choice seems to let a lot of candidates down so perhaps greater research into the use of these would help. It was rare to see much drafting which is disappointing.

Some centres 'taught' or set class tasks for all research into similar products, when one genre was being developed. This led to some very detailed and high level research, but also to a sense that not all candidates were really engaged with what they were writing.

There has been an increasing problem of candidates lifting research from the online blogs of earlier submissions. This occurred particularly with the print products. Centres are encouraged to get candidates to analyse contemporary products, perhaps uploading photos of current editions to analyse, rather than Google examples which have previously been recycled across many candidate blogs.

Again for print, there was a lack of research into different types of page furniture - slugs, boxouts, captions, pull out quotes and so forth. Representational issues were often not dealt with in a comprehensive fashion. Many candidates did not discuss their photos or composition of shots in a way that shows the creation of meaning or encoding or even what effect they were meant to have on an audience.

Some of the best research and planning seen included a film opening analysis with every bit of terminology highlighted, remaking an old student project and trying to improve it and undertaking a full equipment audit examining strengths and weakness of each item. In one centre, there were several rough cuts of each group's film openings embedded on the blogs, each showing peer feedback and the group's responses. This was then possible to use as evidence for the audience question in the evaluation, as well as enhancing their final productions. Such good practice is applauded.

Construction

This element still tends to be the most likely to be overmarked and centres are advised to look at the exemplar material provided at <http://ocrmediastudies.weebly.com/index.html>. The exemplars should be used as part of the standardisation process within centres in order to ensure an appropriate sense of standard.

Video

There were some excellent examples of film openings where candidates had clearly worked hard to establish a sense of enigma and atmosphere. However, more often, candidates did not focus well on what the narrative was, although the convention may have been clear there wasn't a clear idea about the story that was being told. Many film openings ended abruptly; candidates had put some thought into what they wanted to show in the opening sequence but not enough into how they would close the sequence.

There were some very short submissions, often less than a minute in length; such work is unlikely to be developed sufficiently to score above level 2. At the other end of the scale, some openings lasted four or five minutes, which meant that they tended to lack focus and made many technical errors. This, and a tendency to tell too much of the story, demonstrated a lack of relevant research.

The combination of effective use of images and sound, titles and lighting worked extremely well in some of the better work. There were many examples of highly proficient editing and excellent camerawork, the outcome of work on skills development. However, in some cases there was little sense of control of the camera, with an over-reliance on zooms and shaky material without tripods. Camerawork was often good, indeed excellent in some cases, but centres should encourage candidates to check a shot is in focus, the frame is filled and that lighting is consistent (and there's enough light to see what is happening).

The most popular genres were thrillers, horror and rom-com. The better centres allowed candidates freedom in their choice of genre and the process of pitching and selecting film ideas (with teacher input) was clearly present in the research and planning. Mise en scene was often well chosen, but weaker candidates still tended to focus on the chase in the woods or the school grounds, with the white masked stalker. Soundscapes have improved, with original sound to match original film in the best cases, but there were still relatively few candidates experimenting with foley or using any diegetic sound. Many centres chose to ignore sound altogether- though any film-maker will say it represents 50% of the production. Much attention is needed to this area, to move away from the view that only music is needed and that sound editing can be an afterthought.

Titles remain an area of concern. Given that the task is 'the titles and opening of a new feature', a very high proportion of candidates showed no grasp of the institutional conventions of titles. This reflects an absence of research in this area. Production company idents were much more frequently seen, which was good, but in many cases this was the highlight of titling. Some candidates appeared to include titles either as an afterthought or as a formality without researching the conventional running order. Titles need to be integrated into the planning from the outset. Where this is done, candidates show a clear sense of design and tend to include the key production roles in an appropriate order. It was also very disheartening to see so many careless spelling errors in titles, particularly 'staring' actors; not only is this a typographical error, but films rarely, if at all, use 'starring' before an actor's name.

A few centres caused concern in regards to health and safety. Some candidates used a lot of swearing, replica weapons and badly driven cars. There was often no evidence of risk assessment or parental permission for these elements.

Print

The magazine brief was also popular. Overall, front page covers were the strongest element of magazine work with contents pages most likely to fail to conform to forms and conventions, particularly in the use of images. The quality of double page spreads was variable; the best followed forms and conventions closely and featured striking images while the worst showed lack of awareness of the required point size for magazine copy and often failed to show understanding of basic elements such as the use of columns. At worst, magazine pages were of a standard that one would expect a much younger student to produce and the work of these candidates was often significantly over-marked.

At their best, candidates produced some great photographs with real impact, appropriate to selling the brand and the music genre. Candidates often demonstrated real proficiency with Photoshop, to manipulate their images, and to remedy weaknesses with mediocre and poor images. Getting the details of the shot right in the first place makes the job easier, and the final output better. In all cases, getting the lighting right is the key to success. And on this note, outdoor light during daytime offers the best options. Some centres needed to focus more on the manipulation of images, rather than allowing candidates to settle for just the best image they had taken.

However, there was insufficient variety in terms of original images in many of the magazines. Though it may be appropriate in terms of the genre to use the same subject throughout but more variety in terms of costume and background is still required, and, for a contents page a variety of artists would be expected to feature. This led to many pages containing similar mid-shot or medium close-ups of individuals who were not styled in a way that made them readable as music artists. There were still a large number of candidates who failed to include at least four of their own images and/or included found images, which is not permitted. There were still far too many apparent snapshots of friends and musicians with little consideration of purpose.

There was some very effective branding across the three magazine components, with the best centres encouraging candidates to fully embrace the brief, which was evident as they completed additional tasks, such as adverts in the same house style as the magazine. Use of text was often a problem, its integration with the images and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the fonts and type sizes and styles.

In terms of software, Publisher and Photoshop dominated. Combined, these can produce an effective magazine in suitably skilled hands, but without training on the programs, candidates will (and do) fall hopelessly short. There was also still a sense that the front cover was worth more than contents and double page spreads; this caused all sorts of issues with overmarking and banding work too highly in level 4. Magazines need to be consistent across all three elements (front cover, contents page and dps).

Radio

High level products distinguished by the ability to multi-layer sound effectively were in evidence this series. Stories sourced and adapted from local papers often worked well, and programmes were often well structured with well monitored sound. Many vox pops sounded genuine. Lower level candidates were unable to overlay sound, so that there was one layer of sound at any one time. Most sampled products established continuity well. Presenters appeared to have been carefully selected to be relevant to their target audience. In many cases, candidates were quite successful at editing their pieces so that they sounded professional. In some cases, the products sounded more appropriate for commercial or national radio than community radio.

One centre completing the audio task had been given some specific instructions on how to improve in a previous moderator's report. This advice had clearly been acted on and, as a result, the marks allocated to the work were a fair reflection of its standard. The preliminary tasks were particularly well executed with all candidates asked to introduce a local comedian on a radio show and then lead into an audio clip of him delivering a joke at a stand-up gig. The main tasks included all the requirements of the brief (e.g. specialist reporter, OB, vox pops) and demonstrated the candidates' engagement with the local news agenda.

Websites

There were very few entries for this option and unfortunately nothing of a good standard was seen. Most candidates showed a lack of expertise in the area and missed out elements from the task. Some were created on template platforms which limited how candidates presented their final web sites – most not looking like a real website. If templates websites are to be used then the teacher/candidate need to ensure that the software provided can provide an end result which will be able to incorporate the codes and conventions of modern commercial websites so that they look like the real thing. In many cases, the sites moderated looked like the web c.1995 and showed no grasp of website conventions and how audiences interact with them in 2012.

Evaluation

At the top end, there were some really creative pieces and here candidates had generally used a different technology to answer each question, exploring a range of formats and experimenting creatively. Centres that did particularly well made sure that the evaluation was not an afterthought and that candidates spent a reasonable amount of time producing it, rather than just a couple of lessons at the end of the year. It also appeared that centres had advised candidates to use a variety of technology; often the evaluations were submitted on blogs with PowerPoint, Prezi, video, audio and embedded documents to support.

However too many candidates, some of whom were marked as level four, simply published essays online. Many candidates produced PowerPoint presentations with slides on each question, which were sometimes then recorded. This rarely allowed scope for the depth to consider the issue in the question sufficiently.

There were some issues with group evaluations in general, not allowing all candidates to fully explain their responses and particularly with some that took a less formal tone and failed to address the issues. Often individuals were not identified, making it difficult to untangle who had done what, especially where centres had neglected to comment on the role of the individual in the other elements of the marking. In all group evaluations (video or otherwise) candidates need to be identified by name or candidate number when responding so that the moderator is clear on who has contributed to the group evaluation.

The question on codes and conventions was answered well by the majority of candidates but the questions on representation and distribution weren't entirely understood. These questions often elicited a vague answer and some candidates still talked about the distribution of print products in terms of the retail outlets that would sell them. A number of candidates lumped together the two 'audience' questions and failed to get at the distinctions between them. There also seemed to be a tendency for some candidates to put in their audience feedback with little or no comment to answer the audience questions.

Some centres were awarding candidates marks for doing things like embedding a music video on their Prezi or integrating a screen shot in their blog – these are minimum expectations and not the meticulous workings of level 4 candidates. Prezi was over-used. In most cases the candidate had simply presented text and images - sometimes little of both. These were given high marks for use of digital technology just because the software zoomed in and out and whizzed around a bit even though the answers didn't always show the depth required. In essence, Prezi is just cloud based PowerPoint with multiple angles. Having said this it does have the potential to be used creatively, but like everything else candidates need to be encouraged to go beyond the surface and ensure that responses are relevant. Better responses used a variety of different media forms to present the work, but this was also sometimes done in a way that could be considered 'gimmicky' and was arguably not the most suitable method for the task. It would have been much simpler and more successful for candidates to have recorded their own video/podcast in this case. Some responses that demonstrated depth of understanding featured candidates' reflections in podcasts or directors' commentaries uploaded to YouTube. However, often these too ran the risk of becoming essays read aloud over images. While YouTube annotations and fake Facebook profiles used by some candidates were inventive, it was sometimes difficult to consider that these demonstrated candidate understanding in real depth.

The time spent on this component often did not reflect the weighting of the marks. Too many were very brief written accounts, lacking any specific detail or references (e.g. for the first question about conventions quite a number of candidates spoke vaguely, for example, 'use of sound being important in thriller films' without explaining any further). The same could be said of the 'institutions' question where quite often no institution was even named!

General

Overall, the most significant issues were once again with over-marking, with some candidates being entered as level 4 across all three components and having to come down to level 2. It is very important that centres read their moderator report in conjunction with this general report and make use of the online facilities to both support teaching and get a better sense of the standard expected.

G322 Key Media Concepts (TV Drama) and G323 Key Media Concepts (Radio Drama)

In this series there was plenty of evidence of excellent analysis and understanding of the questions set. There were many very good responses which showed consistent and at times sustained analysis, a clear and sometimes sophisticated style and an ability to consider key concepts in media. The best answers integrated formal description of the TV Drama extract with convincing discussion of the context and the concepts. Given the aspect of the representation analysed on ability/ disability, candidates addressed this topic with a pleasing degree of maturity and respect.

The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised. Candidates who had been well prepared with specific case study material and were well rehearsed in the key conceptual areas of institution and audiences offered sustained and excellent arguments in relation to the set question.

Given the very small number of entries for Radio drama this report focuses on the unit G322 Television Drama, which shares the same question two. In this report, there is reference to and repeated advice from the previous Principal Examiner reports.

Question 1 – Television drama

The question required candidates to move from description of key technical areas to analysis of how representations of ability and disability were constructed. Most candidates addressed the key media concept of representation in the extract, contrasting a discussion of the representation of Ben's disability with the representation of his able brother, David. Most candidates were able to engage with analysis of ability/disability and the hierarchal relations between the two principal characters.

In approaching the set question, candidates pre-dominantly analysed their chosen examples of representation in a chronological address of the extract, whilst integrating different technical aspects, for example, combining the analysis of camera composition with sound. Stronger candidates provided an integrated analysis of the extract through analysis of key examples identified. These candidates explored how the technical features could be applied in combination with each other.

However, lesser achieving candidates struggled to achieve a satisfactory balance with the chronological approach, frequently omitting coverage of editing or lapsing into passages of description or analysis without reference to representation. These candidates would have been better advised in preparation to adopt a more structured approach, basing their analysis around each technical area in turn or focussing upon ability and disability in turn. These candidates could list many technical aspects, with varying degrees of accuracy, but struggled to say anything meaningful about the representation of ability/disability, at times focusing on character analysis alone or just re-telling the narrative of the piece without appropriate textual exemplification of the micro aspects of the TV drama extract.

Representation

Confident candidates were able to analyse the ways in which the extract attempted to position the audience in relation to Ben and David and their sibling relationship. Candidates showed maturity in terms of their understanding of the juxtaposition of ability and disability.

Frequently, candidates were able to explore the status of David as a confident, able bodied young male in comparison to his brother Ben. As a result candidates were able to explore the nuances of the representation of ability/disability, in relation to the micro technical elements, for example, candidates were able to explore David's 'angst' as a teenager and the alternative viewpoints presented of him as both carer and a selfish, young individual. Stronger responses also showed a good grasp of the brother's ambivalent abilities, in terms of his maturity and expectations of behaviour and these were compared with Ben's expectations as a disabled child. Also, candidates tended to comment on the stereotypical representation of disability as burdensome and either lonely, isolated or incapable of relatively straightforward activities. Some candidates rightly brought out that the Ben is not entirely helpless, noticing the little smirk at the breakfast table, and the fact that he does inhabit his world quite happily at times – the negative sides of 'ability' were also brought out – for example the unruly behaviour of David. Indeed more subtle interpretations offered the view that even the able bodied characters exhibited weaknesses and more commonly that David felt trapped and isolated by the responsibility of his brother.

Those candidates that did less well with the analysis of representation would focus on a discussion of sibling identity and power, rather than ability/disability. Lesser achieving candidates used sweeping generalisations or simply had little to discuss on the topic, some candidates simply suggested that Ben, had few if any abilities.

Camera Shot, Angle and Composition

Most candidates used the correct terminology and could identify shot composition, movement, framing, and angles in relation to each of the characters and their situations and link these to the construction of ability/disability. There was more evidence than previous series that candidates engaged with the exploration of cinematography and composition of shots; for example plenty mentioned the use of shallow focus. The establishing shot of a bird's eye view, which then zoomed and panned around the main character, were all identified well and most candidates took the time to analyse what such an aerial shot allowed the audience to see of the boys' bedroom and what this said about them as individuals. Candidates also engaged with the prolonged use of close-ups, which were explored, in detail and with sensitivity highlighting the maturity of media students to explore these complex topics of representation. The terms panning and tracking were commonly confused with each other, as were the identification and use of high and low angles.

Mise en scene

Overall most candidates had plenty to comment on the micro feature of mise en scene, ranging from some excellent detailed analysis of the set design; principally the contrasting sides of the boys' bedroom, in particular the child like and innocent props associated with Ben and his toys. Candidates also frequently commented on the use of outside locations, such as the activities of the able bodied versus the less abled activities of Ben, for example, David climbing the tree with a low angled shot of Ben looking up and supping on an ice cream. Most candidates also engaged with the end of the extract, with Ben sitting on the double decker bus amongst a noisy set of school children on their way home. Here candidates wrote plenty in interpretation of Ben's loneliness and isolation on the school journey home and paid an equivalent amount of attention to the way in which he appeared to clutch his schoolbag in the playground, as a sign of insecurity. In contrast most candidates also recognised David's ability represented by an artistic drawing in the classroom.

In general, Centres appear to be heeding advice from previous reports about discarding simplistic colour determination in analysis of characters and their actions, which is encouraging. Also more candidates attempted to engage with the issue of lighting to varying degrees. The most able candidates offered detailed and at times quite sophisticated analysis of the representation of ability and disability, because they linked analysis to informed exemplification from the extract. Lesser achieving candidates could describe the mise en scene, but often lacked reference to how the representation was constructed or focused too much on character function, status, family and/or power relations over ability and disability.

Sound

The analysis of sound is continuing to improve with candidates attempting to link music with the representation of the characters. Some candidates were able to discuss the ways in which sound in the extract represented David's frustration at having a disabled brother, for example with the use of the diegetic soundtrack "Wouldn't it be nice'. Most candidates could associate the use of diegetic sound with empathy for Ben, exemplified by the close up of Ben on the bus juxtaposed with a shallow focus and muffled diegetic sounds, signifying detachment and vulnerability.

There seemed to be more confident use of terminology in relation to the soundtrack this series, for example the most able candidates recognised the irony of the pop song used from the Beach Boys. Many candidates were proficient in analysing diegetic/non diegetic sound (however a number of candidates did get diegetic and non diegetic sound mixed up). Candidates also made frequent reference to the dialogue in the extract, especially the use of the voiceover at the beginning of the extract when David anchors his personal feelings for Ben when he narrates his co-existence and lifestyle in terms of his relationship to his disabled brother. Candidates also understood the voiceover technique and acquainted this with David's burden. Lesser achieving candidates relied solely on dialogue in analysis of the sequence, sacrificing analysis of other uses of sound in the extract to analyse the representations offered.

Editing

Candidates were able to discuss the shot-reverse shot technique, for example in the family home and the positioning of the two main characters. In addition, most candidates were able to identify and discuss the significance of the use of slow motion at the end of the extract, discussed with varying degrees of success. The most able candidates also made reference to a range of editing techniques, which included the use of crosscutting, pacing and the montage of black and white evolutionary images. The montage of evolutionary images used was identified by most candidates, some offering in analysis, an examination of the David's thoughts and an evolutionary scale, whilst some candidates were simply confused about the context and use of these images; or even omitted any analysis of this sequence of shots. 'Jump cut' remains a term that is misused and overused, for example, when candidates labelled the transition from the establishing external shot to the interior shot of the family home.

Editing remains the most challenging area for analysis, although there are some encouraging signs that fewer candidates this series seemed to omit this area altogether. Some less able candidates had gaps in their knowledge and understanding of editing terminology, for example editing transitions were often identified as 'switched' or 'flicked' or 'choppy editing'.

Advice offered to centres is keep working on editing as a micro aspect examined for question one and focus on how meaning is constructed through shot sequencing and what is being represented by the edited TV drama extract.

General Comments on Question 2

The question provided suitable differentiation of candidate responses; it allowed candidates to use their case study material to formulate an argument that responded to the question. The question provoked a range of responses from candidates many of whom were able to discuss the role of cross-media convergence and synergy in the marketing of media products. The best answers were able to create a debate around the necessity of cross-media convergence and synergy in engaging appropriate audiences; strong candidates were frequently able to draw contrasts between strategies used by mainstream and independent producers and the ways that these built mass or niche target markets.

The best answers tended to come from candidates who had been well prepared with detailed, contemporary case studies and were able to select relevant material from these to respond to the question. Many candidates were able to build their own experiences as consumers into their responses and were able to contextualise these through wider understanding of the relationships between producers and audiences. More candidates are able to show awareness of the trends and strategies that categorise the contemporary media landscape. Lesser achieving candidates often misunderstood what was meant by cross-media convergence and synergy or got the two terms confused, others struggled to define the terms at times.

The highest achieving candidates used focussed textual exemplification from their case studies to create a debate centred around the relative strengths of distribution practices and marketing strategies offered by institutions to engage with appropriate target audiences. Strong candidates were also frequently able to draw contrasts between mainstream and independent producers, and/or mass audience/niche audience targeting. More candidates were able to show awareness of the trends and strategies that categorise the contemporary media landscape, which included the continued transformation of older industry practice in the digital and online age.

Strong responses from candidates displayed a wide range of relevant and contemporary examples of marketing and cross-media convergence and synergy in their chosen area and could discuss these examples with confidence. Those candidates that fared less well used a 'saturation approach' to address the question, writing all they could remember, rather than addressing the set question.

In these cases, candidates struggled to deliver knowledge and understanding of marketing campaigns in relation to the media area studied. This resulted in 'all I know' essays, where marketing knowledge was limited to the odd reference to poster, trailer, online marketing and consequently could not address the question set. Centres are reminded that they need to teach all areas of the required specification to candidates.

Where centres had only prepared a limited case study, candidates did not have enough evidence to make a persuasive response to the question set. Also there was a neglect of the role of the audience by some candidates who tended to focus on a potted history of the institution and not address the key concepts being examined. It is advised that centres ensure appropriate preparation for this section by covering audience in the same depth as institutions. At the same time centres should not 'over-teach' audience theory – 'hypodermic needle' or 'uses and gratifications', instead centres should focus on the audience as a consumer, a market or as a targeted group.

There is still a tendency to teach case study material which is out of date, for example, Working Title – Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994), Notting Hill (1999), Bridget Jones Dairies (2001). There are so many other choices to study with candidates, which will empower them to perform better in the examination. Centres should be careful with anecdotal evidence – examples from or regarding YouTube, Facebook, Apps and games consoles need to be grounded within specific arguments relating to media texts – the general use of these online technologies without context should be avoided.

Film Industry

The most common approach remains a comparison between major US studios with UK production companies, often focusing on marketing strategies. A common approach by candidates was to compare traditional marketing strategies, in terms of posters and film trailers and acknowledging the transformation of the media area in the online age, with a focus on marketing strategies via cross-media convergence and synergy. Lesser achieving candidates omitted discussion of marketing and advertising campaigns.

Disney worked well as a case study; candidates could link cross-media convergence with the use of TV shows, theme parks and websites, and merchandising stores. The most able candidates produced excellent accounts of marketing practices and discussed how these targeted audiences, for example in the Avengers, Dark Knight, Kings Speech, Streetdance 3D, Vertigo films, Attack the Block & Film Four, This is England, the Boat that Rocked and Slumdog Millionaire. The advantages of marketing campaigns were discussed, but with varying effectiveness at times, in part because candidates see film as being freely available as a digital format online, which is often not the case. Many candidates accurately argued that cross-media convergence and synergy are important marketing practices necessary for the frontloading of film marketing campaigns, for example, the Dark Knight, Avatar, Paul and The Kings Speech, Avengers.

Music Industry

Yet again the music industry proved to be a popular area for study. The best answers were able to contextualise factual knowledge within an argument, with good use of detailed examples. The majority of music industry case studies focused on comparing a major and an independent, with Domino coming up often. On the whole the case studies were prepared well with the candidates exploring the fact that Major labels are part of conglomerates who get to utilise synergy in a host of ways, with examples coming from artists being used in films, through to TV (X-factor & Syco, BBC and The Voice) and promotion through print outlets like NME and Kerrang music publications.

Candidates were able to argue that bigger companies are more reliant on cross-media campaigns and synergy, but independent companies often use a number of creative alternatives. These were best discussed when linked to individual artists/tracks and detailed knowledge of individual campaigns was in evidence. Some candidates concentrated on issues of distribution, discussing music formats, downloading and piracy as key areas, but often these were not contextualised by the demands of the question.

The most able candidates were able to show a good understanding of marketing practices in the online age and could contrast the practices of a media conglomerates, predominantly Universal and Sony and EMI in comparison with 'indie' labels, such as Domino, Jalapeno, XL and Rough Trade record labels. Candidates could effectively discuss the practices used by major record companies to maximise reach and profits, providing exemplification of vertical and horizontal integration, which were vital to such media institutions. Most of the answers seen looked at Sony and Universal music and offered contrast with a range of independent companies such as Rough Trade, Domino, Ghostbox and Finders Keepers records. The question was designed to provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of digital distribution, marketing practices and audience consumption.

Discussion of independents' use of Web 2.0 as a distribution and marketing tool was sometimes naive, suggesting that any band could become successful this way, irrespective of the financial investment required. Some candidates need to clarify their knowledge of third party companies such as Apple and their relationship with music institutions and audiences.

Candidates should be careful in solely relying on Spotify as a case study and on the discussion of illegal downloading, because candidates answers could not specifically discuss the how a media company could market a product and such approaches restricted candidates understanding of the symbiosis between institution and audience.

Newspaper Industry

The most able candidates were able to explore the impact of marketing and distribution upon the audience. Candidates were able to discuss the decline of the traditional press as a print medium and the necessity therefore of the institution to develop a broader 'brand identity' across a number of mediums, using the available proliferation of technology, either online as an App, or through the use of e-readers and iPads. The Sun and the Guardian were popular case studies with candidates discussing the ways in which the web presented opportunities to compensate for the decline in the print medium.

There was evidence of some very good comparison between national titles, such as the Daily Mail, The Guardian and local newspapers such as the Ilford Recorder. There was plenty of evidence of how candidates have argued that the newspaper industry has been transformed by the online media through the use of instant news updates available through Web 2.0, including a discussion of the need for the newspaper industry to market itself through online promotion, for example, The Sun website and its use of merchandising tie-ins. Those candidates that did not achieve as well often lost focus on marketing through synergy and paid too much attention to digital distribution and online technologies, thus not entirely addressing the set question.

Magazine Industry

This was a much better series for candidates who responded on magazines, indeed centres appear to have heeded advice from previous reports that too much focus was on textual analysis and audience theory. Magazine case studies of Cosmopolitan, NME and Kerrang all proved popular and fruitful. In relation to Cosmopolitan, useful contextual information was given about its owner Hearst and the co-operation with NatMag. There were some excellent responses built around individual publications that showed how changes in the ways 'print' products are marketed, distributed and consumed benefited from the cross-media convergence that major publishers have access to. There were some very good case studies of the Guardian Media Group and Bauer's FHM magazine along these lines.

Many candidates were knowledgeable about the online presence of Cosmo (with its website), its online radio and TV, weekly updates, subscription reminders and the difference between its US and UK websites. There was a plethora of knowledge and understanding about the relationship between social networking sites and Cosmopolitan, the threats from consumers going direct to source for celebrity gossip, for example, celebrity tweets, and the move towards using mobile and tablet Apps to maintain consumer interest.

Radio Industry

There were a small number of responses for Radio. Answers were confident and compared different areas of the industry including Commercial and Public Service Broadcasting. Candidate responses clearly discussed the digital developments within the industry and the effect on both audiences and institutions. Candidates were informed on the marketing of radio shows and the role of cross-media convergence and synergy, for example using radio to promote music artists, tie-ins with festivals and promotion of other media. This was inevitably linked to the expansion of digital radio and the use of online technologies, for example, competitions, use of websites as communities, the function of twitter and instant messaging as feedback to radio shows. Case studies that worked well included BBC Radio 6, Radio 1 and Absolute and Capital FM radio. Lesser achieving candidates often lacked focus on what the question demanded.

Video Games Industry

The most convincing answers tended to come from candidates who had been well prepared with detailed, contemporary case studies and were able to select relevant material from these to respond to the question. Most able candidates could respond with persuasion on the marketing of video games such as Angry Birds and Doom, Call of Duty, FIFA and Guitar Hero. These responses were able to discuss the marketing of the chosen game to the intended audience and also evaluate the need to use cross-media convergence and synergy relating to 'game hubs' through phone tie-ins, X-box marketing, game magazines and online communities.

Some candidates did very well in this area focussing on Rockstar Games (Grand Theft Auto 4), discussing distribution, marketing and exchange across platforms. Candidates were able to discuss the franchise and were able to discuss the importance of synergy and technological convergence with relevance to the question. There was some focus on games such as Angry Birds and Farmville with varying degrees of success.

It was clear in some cases that candidates were answering this question from their own experiences as consumers rather than from prepared case study material and a year's study of key media concepts. Good answers focussed on a particular studio or franchise and were able to show how bigger studios were able to take advantage of horizontal integration within their parent companies or looked at alternative marketing strategies used by smaller or independent studios. Rockstar and the GTA franchise were frequently used as illustration, as were Activision and the Call of Duty games. Quite a few centres seemed to have prepared case studies around hardware – particular games consoles – and candidates struggled to answer the question with this information alone. Knowledge of the different games platforms and their relative strengths and weaknesses is of course relevant, but better used when bound up with the study of specific games or developers. There was little acknowledgement of the growth of casual gaming platforms such as smart phones or tablets despite the significance of these for many major publishers.

Weaker candidates tended to give too much personal opinion/ anecdotal evidence on the gaming case studies.

G324 Principal Moderator's Report

This was, once again, a series in which moderators were privileged to see a large amount of creative, informed and technically controlled work, the strongest of which was clearly produced by candidates destined to work in the creative media industries. Best practice from centres showed accurate assessment and thoughtful presentation of their candidates' work, so that moderators could see easily the journeys made and understand the outcomes in context. However, a number of centres still need to get to grips with the demands of the Specification at this level.

Some centres were fortunate enough to have access to 'high end' equipment but most centres were able to train their candidates to produce highly effective work using equipment with a more modest spec; a few centres were clearly limited by their technology – one centre had four flip cams as their total hardware, whilst others appeared to have very little support in other technical areas. However, it was rare to see candidates working with relatively basic software packages like Movie Maker and Publisher, with most centres providing access to the likes of Premiere Pro, Final Cut (Express and Pro), Audacity, Cubase, GarageBand, Photoshop, InDesign and Dreamweaver, allowing their candidates to work with professional level software.

The following report has been written with substantial input from the whole moderating team.

Administration

Work from Centres was generally submitted promptly following submission requests. Administration was generally helpful although a number of centres submitted incomplete coursework cover sheets, in particular missing candidate numbers. This made moderation extremely difficult so it is essential that all cover sheets are completed fully. An increased number of Centres needed to be reminded to send their Centre Authentication Forms (CCS160); there were some instances when only cover sheets were sent with no work or blog addresses, which needed to be chased. Centres are expected to send printed coversheets, not digital coversheets on a disc.

Some centres have clearly taken note of previous moderator and Principal Moderator reports and are clearly indicating on the front of cover sheets the names of candidates who have worked together on a group production and writing detailed comments indicating individual contributions to the group work. However there is still a large number of centres where this is not the case and all candidates in a group are allocated exactly the same marks, which makes moderation extremely difficult in terms of establishing how the assessment criteria have been applied, especially where on group blogs entries appear to have been largely made by one or two members of a group.

There were still clerical errors which held up the moderation process, although centres which used the interactive coversheet tended to have fewer clerical errors (although a few still managed to transcribe the final marks incorrectly onto the MS1).

Where centres are working in a Consortium it is their responsibility to notify OCR of this every series and in good time (at least three months before the receipt of marks deadline) so that the appropriate systems can be put into place for them to be moderated as a Consortium.

Centres are requested to ensure that sufficient postage is paid on coursework parcels and envelopes; moderators had to pay the postal shortfalls on a number of submissions again this series.

Formats

The majority of candidates submitted work on blogs and best practice used blogs in an on-going way, writing directly onto the blog so as to evidence their journey. It made the process of looking at the connections between research, planning and the final artefacts far more effective, especially when work was tagged well. Centres should encourage their candidates to clearly set out their blogs so that each of the relevant sections (planning and research, productions and evaluations) are obvious to the moderator. and drafts are distinguishable from final versions. Other centres used blogs to paste their work in at the end, which defeated the purpose and negated the benefits of blogging; as one moderator noted, that method 'seems to directly affect any sense of on-going discovery'. Having said that, exhaustive, day by day, hour by hour accounts of who turned up when etc. could be easily removed as they do not add anything to the overall understanding of the planning of the production. Some centres set blogging tasks that really only produced essays which was not what is intended or expected in this Specification; blogging allows for a fully interactive multimedia experience, and allows for ongoing feedback both from teachers and peers (although this aspect was rarely made the most of). Generally the use of blogs is becoming quite accomplished and candidates appear to have a real sense of 'ownership' by using this platform: some candidates even commented on how enjoyable the process had been. In this series more than others there were issues with missing elements on blogs, as if centres hadn't checked to make sure the evidence used for assessment was available. Blogspot and Wordpress were the most frequently used, and the easiest to moderate, followed by Wix and Weebly, although there were a number of candidates using Tumblr this year which didn't seem to be as straightforward to navigate. One candidate used a site called blog.co.uk but this had such intrusive advertising that it detracted from their work – Centres need to be careful which platform they choose (although in the case of that centre they appeared to have let the candidates choose for themselves). Centres might also encourage candidates to be more circumspect in the names they give their blogs. Blogs must be kept online and related YouTube accounts etc must remain active until the end of results enquiries.

A number of candidates submitted work on a combination of blogs and data discs which was a confusing and usually unnecessary process – blogs will house all necessary work if saved in the correct format.

The use of blog hubs was more widespread in this series and this is excellent practice as it presents candidates' work in an organised and appropriate way and makes the moderation process much easier but it is essential that Centres check the blog links by actually clicking on them before they are sent off – all too often links were broken or had been typed in inaccurately on the hub. Most VLEs were very difficult to work from, with awkward access, counter intuitive interface and the need to download copious numbers of files onto the moderator's computer. A number of centres insisted on sending work on many discs which made moderation cumbersome.

A significant minority of centres submitted work that had to be downloaded by the moderator – this is not acceptable – large file sizes take a long time to download and there is also a risk of viruses being spread during this process. The files to be downloaded tended either to be moving image files, which needed downloading in order to run freely, or Word files, which goes against the spirit of this digital Specification.

Most work was submitted in appropriate formats though some centres need to revisit the specification (p35), ensuring that work is submitted in acceptable formats in future as some work was submitted on memory sticks and others on disk as Photoshop or Fireworks files. Several of the centres who made websites for ancillary tasks had merely made them in jpeg form (in other words as a *picture* of a website), as opposed to a fully working active homepage. As the Specification says: 'Web pages ... **must be accessible on line to the moderator for the duration of the moderation period**. The moderator must receive notification of the URL when the work is sent.' (p35). Hard copies of print work should not be sent; as the Specification says, 'The whole portfolio **must** be submitted in **digital/electronic** format' (p35). One centre sent work with separate video and audio that had to be imagined together (or edited by the moderator themselves!) – clearly unacceptable!

Assessment

Most Centres wrote detailed comments applying the assessment criteria to candidates' work and this aided the moderation process greatly in terms of indicating how marks allocated had been arrived at. Some centres, though, wrote extremely brief comments and others just copied and pasted the criteria for the level allocated without explaining how the candidates' work met those criteria and this made supportive moderation a difficult process. (Handwritten comments and blog addresses were often difficult to decipher). However, at the opposite end of the scale, some centres are providing very full explanations of how marks were determined, often supplementing the spaces on the official coversheet with additional sheets. Whilst not expected they do suggest a centre that has approached assessment in a rigorous way.

Many centres did allocate marks broadly in line with the agreed standard though most tended to be over-generous; a minority of centres accurately applied the assessment criteria to candidates' work. A significant minority were markedly over-generous; more centres than in previous series assessed their work as being top level 4 when it was low level 4 or even level 3. Significant numbers thought their candidates' work was level 3 when it was low level 2. A significant number of centres did not utilise the full range of available marks, allocating marks for all elements of candidates' work in levels 3 and 4 which is where problems occurred when moderating as marks tended to be bunched, and this led to potential issues with centres' orders of merit.

Research and Planning

The quality and depth of research and planning was varied and this element tended to be over-marked by a large number of centres as they tended to focus on research *or* planning when applying the criteria rather than looking at the work as a whole when allocating marks. For example, some candidates had conducted extremely thorough planning for their video productions, including storyboards, location visits, call sheets etc but had conducted very little research into existing media texts and no research into a potential target audience. Consequently the allocation of high level 3 or level 4 marks in such cases was inappropriate. Similarly some candidates were allocated inappropriately high marks as, although they had conducted extremely detailed analyses of texts, planning evidence was extremely limited. While there was some extremely detailed research into existing texts relevant to the main task production, this quality of research was lacking when it came to the ancillary texts, consequently many outcomes bore less resemblance to their intended product than the candidates intended, with digipaks having panes that were all different shapes and sizes and with no institutional information for example, film posters that were the wrong aspect ratio and with no credit blocks, radio advertisements that lasted a couple of minutes and that lacked any pace, etc.

It is important that, when assessing work, centres apply all the criteria rather than being selective and allocating high marks for the better aspects of candidates' work.

Some candidates had detailed theory on their blogs relevant to main task productions which had clearly been taught by centres. While such understanding of theory is extremely useful this was often given undue emphasis by centres. Analysis of existing media texts is a crucial aspect of research in terms of informing the construction process. It is extremely clear where candidates have undertaken detailed analysis and used the results of this to inform the construction process, resulting in texts which are much more in keeping with the codes and conventions of the relevant genre. Where this level of research is lacking it was clearly reflected in productions which were lacking in basic understanding of key codes and conventions.

Research into a potential target audience was a weakness across a large number of centres; either being omitted totally or just a brief statement of the intended audience with no evidence of research into this audience. As with research into existing texts, this is an extremely important aspect of work on this unit in terms of researching, for example, audience expectations of a genre. Not only does this then give candidates' further information to take into account when planning the construction process to ensure texts are appropriate for audience, but it also gives them material which they can then use in their evaluation.

There were some superb examples of extremely thorough planning, particularly for moving image texts, with candidates mirroring industry practice including such things as storyboards/animatics, call sheets, location visit sheets, risk assessments and shooting schedules. More commonly, though, planning was generally limited to just storyboards and in some cases these consisted of very few frames. In some cases storyboards were constructed using screengrabs from the filmed production. By their very nature this is not evidence of planning, being created after the construction process has been undertaken. Planning of print texts was more limited, generally to sketches of layout, with little evidence provided of the planning of images and content.

Centres need to ensure candidates' planning is more thorough in order to access high level 3 and level 4 marks; and to use their blogs or PowerPoint presentations more effectively to present their work. Candidates should be encouraged to use their blogs as an ongoing record of their work throughout this unit, so clearly illustrating the 'creative journey' they have undertaken. In many cases blogs consisted of only a handful of entries and most of these appear to have been posted in a relatively short space of time.

Construction

An increased number of centres offered a range of briefs to their candidates; often this resulted in less successful outcomes than if centres worked to their own strengths – it also resulted in less reliable merit orders.

The music and film promotion briefs and the short film option were the most popular in this series, though there were a number of TV documentary extracts and a few local newspaper, soap trailers, TV advertisements for a new product or service and a couple of children's TV openings. There were a couple of examples of the new regional magazine brief but there was little radio work, although one moderator commented positively on the submission of a radio play, 'Feckless Contingency', which was a humorous homage to 'A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy'.

Most music video productions combined narrative and performance, though some Centres submitted work which was all narrative based. Real narrative music videos are usually shot in an arty way with creative camera work, and careful attention to mise en scene; unfortunately many of the texts seen by moderators were just candidates telling a little story, usually about the breakdown of a relationship, during the time taken for the track to play out. This is problematic largely because in many cases productions tended to read as short films, with the soundtrack secondary to the visuals and so defeating the object of the text in terms of promoting the music or creating an image for the artist. Other weaker music videos were a literal interpretation of the lyrics. The best productions clearly planned the performance aspect of the video in some detail with careful consideration of mise-en-scene and the performance clearly filmed more than once with different camera set ups. Synchronicity of sound and visuals is a crucial aspect of this brief in terms of enabling candidates to access the highest marks. A number of centres appeared to ignore errors with synching or commented that there were issues with the synching but still allocated level 4 marks, which is inappropriate.

The best film trailers clearly demonstrated excellent understanding of the genre and the ways the texts work to intrigue audiences and entice them to watch the whole film. These made use of a variety of shot types which made for effectively paced trailers in the edit; centres seem to have finally realised that a trailer should be maximum two minutes and should try to act as a tease for the film's story. More candidates made use of intertitles and did this well but there was a marked lack of voice overs for trailers (although this might be down to issues of equipment). However, far too many trailers submitted followed the narrative sequence of the film they were promoting, including giving away major plot points or twists, and used few camera shots with little variety of shot types and mise-en-scene, which demonstrated weak understanding of the genre. In these cases, more focused analytical research would have been more beneficial prior to the planning stage.

Short films are an increasingly popular brief and there were some excellent short films submitted in this series which showed superb understanding of film grammar. The films were clearly planned extremely thoroughly, with simple yet engaging narratives, and constructed with real creative flair in the camerawork and editing. Some centres took advantage of the 'approximately' 5 minutes long wording within the specification and made short films lasting approximately 3 minutes – others were around 10 minutes. Centres are advised to stick to the five minutes specified.

Lighting was an issue for many centres; sound recording on video a problem for others. Such issues either need to be addressed or other briefs chosen in order to maximise candidate marks. Expensive equipment isn't necessary in that research properly applied to planning combined with technical confidence generally results in pleasing outcomes. However, the move to DSLRs is bringing with it a new aesthetic, with candidates less likely to move the camera (the more unforgiving depth of field perhaps being the reason?) but experimenting much more with focus, resulting in pieces which made greater use of the foreground and background as well as the left/right top/bottom of the frame. A number of centres are still carrying out their production work in the school/ college surroundings, when it is not appropriate for the mise en scène. The availability of locations should also be considered in choosing production tasks.

Newspaper productions did generally show good understanding of the codes and conventions of the genre though more attention to the images used and font sizes would have strengthened the work. A very small number of centres used totally inappropriate software for the construction of newspapers. Word and Publisher are not desktop publishing software that are suitable for the construction of authentic newspaper projects. The flexibility of programs such as Quark Xpress, or InDesign used in conjunction with imaging software such as Photoshop enable candidates to use their creativity to produce texts which closely follow codes and conventions.

The use of found images in candidates' print work is still a considerable cause for concern, especially where candidates have been awarded level 3 or 4 marks for construction. The specification clearly states that **all** material must be original, produced by the candidates themselves: 'All material for all tasks to be produced by the candidates with the exception of acknowledged non-original sound or image material used in a limited way in video/radio work' (p34). However it would appear, due to the marks allocated for some work, that some centres either have not read the specifications in detail or are choosing to 'ignore' the use of found material, being seduced by the overall finish of candidates' productions. Where found material is used this must be reflected in the marks allocated as the assessment criteria clearly refer to the taking of images, and if candidates do not do this they can not be given credit for somebody else's work.

In fact, ancillary tasks were mostly print based and although this could be seen as a missed opportunity to cover three media it could result in more technically polished and cohesive campaigns. There still appears to be a tendency in some centres to see the ancillary tasks as something candidates can sort out for themselves – varied methods of production (software, equipment, approach) and an apparent lack of teaching. The best centres appear to have taught candidates all aspects of how to produce the ancillary texts, encouraging original photography (rather than low resolution screen grabs).

Digipaks continue to be the main problem with regard to ancillary texts. The revised Specification requires the production of a digipak, not just a cover (p32), and this should consist of a minimum of four panels; yet many Centres gave level 4 marks to digipaks which had no spines and fewer than 4 panels. Some centres were still looking at an early version of the Specification and produced DVD covers. Centres are advised to look closely at some of the many digipak templates available online and to get their candidates to design their work using this basic template (that would mean they could also start considering such industrial issues such as bleed lines etc.).

However, some of the print ancillaries were excellent with a very clear grasp of the forms and conventions of the products they were making along with the practical skills to put this knowledge into operation. Posters at times still presented a problem, particularly those presented as part of music promotion packages; all too often a “tour” poster was submitted, being simply a list of dates with a photo tagged on. However, generally there was far more cross-media promotion in good centres and even most weaker centres considered the cohesiveness of the three pieces.

Few websites were submitted in this series, but where they were only a small number were submitted as working URLs, as required by the specifications. As noted earlier, the submission of jpegs of web pages is not a satisfactory alternative.

Just one or two games packages were seen, one of which used 100% found images which is against the requirements of Specification.

A small number of centres appear to have given candidates a free choice of which brief to follow for this unit, submitting work in response to at least five different briefs. While this is perfectly acceptable in terms of the Specification, in most cases this lead to problems with standardising marking across all the briefs undertaken in a centre and potential issues with centres’ orders of merit. In such cases centres should consider limiting the number of briefs available as this not only makes standardising much easier, but also makes it easier for centres to plan delivery and to support candidates more effectively.

There seemed to be more health and safety concerns this year in comparison to last, including lighting fires in woodland, driving whilst on a mobile, free running precariously balanced on a wall that abutted a dual carriageway. Centres are reminded both of their duty of care to their candidates – but also that effective risk assessments are an industrial practice that candidates should be following.

Evaluation

Evaluations continue to be a particular sticking point for a large number of centres. Most did address the required four questions fairly effectively using a range of interesting and appropriate methods to demonstrate their understanding. However, some centres asked candidates to answer the questions for G321 Foundation Portfolio, or a combination of G321 and G324 questions. Some centres should be more aware that all four set questions need to be answered (see Specification p30) – in some cases candidates simply produced an overall evaluation (normally summed up with “My production was a great success”) and all too often these failed to address all the areas required for the evaluation by the specification.

The presentation of candidates’ responses is still the biggest issue with this aspect of the component, with a considerable number of candidates answering the questions in essay form and then just uploading these to their blogs or PowerPoint presentations and inserting some still images. In doing so candidates immediately exclude themselves from level 4 marks.

The best evaluations not only consisted of extremely detailed responses to the four questions but also used different presentation methods for each response, using video and audio as well as programs such as Prezi and PowerPoint, fully exploiting the technology available to them to creatively present their work. However, some Prezis were far less effective; indeed, as one moderator put it: ‘the Prezi moved from one paragraph of writing (with photo attached) to another in a sickening whirl of pointlessness’. Other less-than effective methods of evaluation were unedited films of students reading or referring to notes to answer the four questions; they often failed to use images or ICT to make this engaging, even if the material was thoughtful and appropriate.

In some centres, evaluations were completed as a group with each of the four candidates answering one of the questions. This is extremely problematic and must be avoided in future series because candidates are assessed individually against the criteria and so answering one question means that they fail to meet most of the assessment criteria for the evaluation. Centres should consider asking candidates to produce individual evaluations in future or if group evaluations are produced each candidate should contribute to all four responses and the Centre comments on the coursework cover sheet should indicate what their contributions were. As for G321, in all group evaluations (video or otherwise) candidates need to be identified by name or candidate number when responding so that the moderator is clear on who has contributed to the group evaluation.

Question 4 is often the least well answered, with candidates usually producing a list of hardware and software used with comments such as ‘If I hadn’t had Final Cut I wouldn’t have been able to make a good video’ but no analysis of how and why they had used it. The audience question is often weak because candidates have just posted an audience feedback video with no attempt to provide their own commentary on the feedback, explaining what they have learnt from it.

Overall

In general there was some extremely creative work being produced by candidates with some excellent teaching and support provided, which shows that many centres have got to grips with the spirit of the Specification. However some centres would do well to revisit the Specification to ensure that they are providing candidates with the correct guidance and instruction in order to achieve marks in the highest levels. In addition, moderators’ Centre Reports offer comments on good practice to continue developing together with diagnostic comments on any issues that might need addressing. Centres are advised to make sure that they read these reports and are also encouraged to continue to take advantage of the resources offered by OCR. <http://ocrmediastudies.weebly.com> will provide links to resources and examples of work from all units and the new community site at <http://social.ocr.org.uk> holds an archived forum for information and discussion.

G325 Principal Examiner Report

General Comments

Once again it was pleasing to see candidates demonstrating their critical media literacy in responding to contemporary debates about the mediation of our social and cultural lives and in theorising their own creative practices. Whilst levels of quality and engagement were variable, the ‘spirit’ of this component appears to have been grasped and, in the main, critical reflection on media in relation to candidates’ own lives and culture was demonstrated across the cohort. Arguably, this is the ‘richest’ time since the inception of the specification for candidates to be responding to these questions – the role of media in socio-political life and digital media technology in the ‘lifeworld’ has been a constant theme in public discourse for the last year and, as expected, the candidates who embraced the ‘now’ of these critical perspectives were those that, generally, received marks in the level 4 band.

The most important point to stress in this report is that some of the perennial flaws in candidates’ approaches to this paper are at the level of the centre and, thus it is reasonable to hypothesise, a symptom of pedagogy rather than candidate aptitude. This is worrying. The most common of these are a failure to engage with contemporary examples (texts, case studies, debates, institutional practices and / or policy from within five years of the examination); a failure to distinguish between the requirements for 1a (process, decisions made) and 1b (textual analysis using media concepts); a failure to distinguish between the coursework evaluation questions and section A of G325; a failure to apply academic theory in section B (most commonly evident in answers on the online age and regulation) and a failure to engage with alternative arguments within a debate, resulting in one sided answers (most commonly found in online age / democracy / global media). Centres are urged to ensure that schemes of work are in synch with the requirements of the specification.

The following reflections on candidate responses and performance is an accumulation of reports submitted by all of the examiners. As such, it combines ‘macro’ level observations of general trends and patterns with ‘micro’ level examples of particular successes and problems.

Section A

1(a)

As one examiner expresses it, *“the question was touching on the idea that, even at the back end of the production process, in the geeky world of software editing where attention to detail is paramount, decisions can be inspired and ‘creative’”*. Where candidates were able to offer detailed and sustained examples of post-production decisions and outcomes, answers were strong and well rewarded. These details included editing, image manipulation, changes after evaluation and feedback, title design, sound editing and marketing. Those that offered merely a narrative account of these were rewarded in level 2. Those that linked these creative decisions to outcomes, combined with a critical reflection on progress made over time, were rewarded in levels 3 and 4. There was frequently a fair discussion of creative decisions, but these were often concerned with storyboards, camera angles, planning and general research, and this did not answer the post-production root of the question.

Unfortunately a significant number of candidates attempted to ‘redirect’ the question to a prepared answer on something else – research and planning and / or conventions of media texts, which in most cases couldn’t work. And a significant minority mistook POST production for PRE production, leading to very low marks being available to them.

1(b)

Once again, marks for 1(b) were often the lowest awarded.

Media language is an ‘umbrella term’ and hence gives candidates a range of options for responding to the question. The key distinguishing criteria was their ability to relate the broad conceptual notion of media language to the medium of their selected coursework production – the language of film, the language of web design, the visual language of magazines. A large percentage of candidates identified semiotics as a central theory for media language, but only in the strongest answers was semiotics applied to the medium at work. A range of writers were utilised here – Goodwin, Barthes, Saussure and Neale were all used well. Laura Mulvey often used in an unfortunately instrumental manner, unintentionally but problematically nonetheless – ‘*we used Mulvey’s male gaze*’. Perhaps surprisingly, many candidates appeared to be reaching to demonstrate an understanding of what the concept of media language actually referred to. This key concept has been tackled in a range of publications specifically tailored to this specification, both in its current and previous form. All too often, lost in the mix was enough discussion of the actual outcomes of the project chosen as the basis for response – too many candidates took extended excursions into discussing / explaining theory or discussing the applications of theory to professional products.

The weakest answers either ignored the question and responded with a prepared answer on genre or representation, with little attempt to contextualise this in a broader understanding of media language or saw candidates writing about the words used in their magazine articles and movie scripts. A number of candidates gave ‘short answers’ to this question, suggesting they found it challenging.

The more sophisticated responses discussed polysemy, juxtaposition and anchorage of media messages using the appropriate micro aspects of the production work - for example in the shot construction or editing process or narrative structure.

The most important advice to impart here is that candidates need to ‘step back’ from the work and assess it as a media text, using conceptual tools in so doing. A clear demarcation between approaches for 1(a) and 1(b) remains too rarely evident.

Section B

Collective Identity

As in previous series, this was the most popular theme. Some examiners have observed a narrowing down in the content of what is discussed. In any case, a focus on the representation of youth is the most popular social group for responses. It was pleasing to see candidates working with the contemporary example of the recent riots and the better responses were those that analysed the media representation of the riots with detailed examples rather than generalisations about the political response rather than its mediation. ‘Kidulthood’ was a very popular choice but centres should check the dates of films with the ‘five year rule’ in mind. In the context of studying identity, candidates need to be aware that “chavs” and “hoodies” are representational terms in themselves as opposed to demographic categories of people who can be represented in media.

More successful responses demonstrated an understanding of the effect of media representations discussing the work of theorists – often including Stanley Cohen. It is very important that candidates apply such theories of media representation and theories of identity to the texts and areas with which they engage. Simply describing how women, Muslims or teenagers are represented in media is insufficient to answer questions about how mediation / representation works, which is a complex issue. On the other hand, in some cases, entire centres theorised mediation very well, with reference to relevant academic arguments, well utilised, but the answers all dealt with examples from the 1960s, 70s, 90s and the early part of this decade. Marks for use of examples in such cases cannot be awarded in the higher levels.

Representations of British Asian people was another popular area. This was generally well handled, with most candidates demonstrating evidence of close textual analysis and applying theory in varying degrees. Most were able to provide a historical context, but not quite as many were able to suggest development for the future. Where post-colonial theory was used, the majority of candidates struggled with the concept of 'other', but many were able to apply ideas around cultural hybridity.

Gauntlett was often used by centres to discuss the implications of representation in terms of identity, but then representations of all groups were often deemed to be hegemonic and a product of the Ideological State Apparatus without any further critical analysis.

Celebrities were another area that worked well, with reality TV shows analysed alongside social media sites, TV chat shows and gossip magazines. Family was also used by some centres as a collective ID – an interesting angle, but in this case candidates often struggled to apply theory or construct a proficient argument.

Postmodern Media

Candidates seem to be really getting to grips with complex theories and how they conflict with one another – the work of Baudrillard, Lyotard and Jameson being well handled in the main, along with Strinati's definitions. Stronger candidates were able to clearly discuss the arguments for and against, aided by close textual analysis, weighing up the ideas of theorists. Popular media areas included advertising and film, with Pulp Fiction still featuring strongly as a historical case study. Gaming also featured strongly, offering a number of very successful case studies in terms of the concepts of 'hyperreality' etc. Weaker candidates struggled with the complexities of post-modern theories however, expressing some very over-simplified ideas and were unable to articulate arguments for/against. It is very important that astute analysis of broader themes is supported by contemporary examples – over-reliance on Pulp Fiction and The Matrix are to be avoided.

Regulation

As expected, there was a great deal of engagement with the Leveson enquiry. Weaker answers were one sided and often quite reactionary – lots of 'othering' of those at risk. Stronger answers offered a balanced and informed view, unlike some of the witnesses at the inquiry! The BBFC website had clearly been a useful resource for many centres. As always, some factual inaccuracies reduced candidates to lower mark levels for use of examples / terminology. Case studies that continue to work well alongside one another are OFCOM, BBFC, PCC and PGEI. It is important that candidates put factual knowledge of regulatory practices in dialogue with academic media theories of 'effects' or broader socio-political debates around democracy, surveillance and free speech.

Many candidates discussed the challenges of regulating the web, including consideration of social media and citizen journalism. Some examiners observed a failure to grasp the issues at the heart of the Leveson enquiry, reflecting that because the inquiry is ongoing, with no firm conclusions as yet, candidates may have found exploring its complexities challenging. In these cases, credit was given for attempting to 'unpack' this important moment. Once again, the same guidance – centres are strongly advised to dispense with Child's Play and its mistaken relationship with the Jamie Bulger case, unless this is to be used as a historical example of ill-informed 'moral panic' media coverage – it is most definitely NOT an example of media effects or of media regulation itself.

But some candidates drew very interesting parallels between the introduction of home video and its attendant moral panic about "video nasties" with its rush to legislate (to produce a law recently discovered to be invalid) and the current reaction to the perils of the internet. This is astute and well informed.

More appropriate responses featured contemporary examples such as The Human Centipede, Arab Spring, Leveson and conflicts in the UK (riots) and Syria, in linking to We Media and citizen journalism. The requirement for historical context is a difficult balancing act for some, it seems. Many candidates gave exhaustive accounts of the press from the 17th Century onwards, through Calcutt et al, leaving themselves very little space for debate of the actual question. Careful crafting of an exam response that is mainly contemporary but grounded in history requires lots of preparation and practice.

Media in the Online Age

At the recent OCR Media Studies conference in London, a workshop took delegates through an exercise linking 'stuff we know' about the internet to academic theories about its impact on media, culture and life. Very straightforwardly, stronger responses achieved this and weaker responses told the examiner things that are obvious from being alive in the developed West in 2012 – for example, that we now download music or that lots of us are on Twitter. Stronger candidates weighed up the whole '2.0' debate, putting together the ideas of Gauntlett, Shirkey, Leadbeater, Merrin, Buckingham, Morozov and thinking through the 'classic' theories of Chomsky and McLuhan, applied to a range of contemporary examples of online media. These stronger answers also achieved balance by utilising examples that serve to prove the 'revolution' argument and those that challenge such 'brave new world' hypotheses.

Global Media

This was a less popular theme and one where candidates seem to struggle the most to offer an informed understanding of a debate. The majority of answers attempt to straightforwardly describe a tautological narrative of globalisation, without dealing with examples that challenge this idea, of which there are many. Better responses were often more specific and in some cases located (geographically and culturally) in the debate. The workings of the Bollywood film industry and the purported use by the Indian government of film to influence the Pakistani population were discussed well, along with the internationalisation of TV formats and hybridity as a feature of global media. This was related to the flattening of cultures, under the auspices of cultural imperialism theory, such as that espoused by Tunstall.

We Media and Democracy

Quite a few centres seem to have prepared candidates to answer on either Media in the Online age and or We Media and Democracy which worked quite well. The more successful responses were able to define 'democracy' and clearly explore the part the media has to play in a democratic society. Well worked included Kony 2012, the role of social networking in the Arab Spring and reality TV as more or less interactive / democratic. Some also discussed current debates around the rise in 'trolling' on internet sites citing Samantha Brick and the London Riots, arguing these examples as undemocratic reactions and 'mob rule'. Some also explored President Obama's use of social networking in his US election campaign. The vast majority of candidates who responded to this question demonstrated personal engagement with the topic which was very pleasing to see. As mentioned, this theme seems to be connected mostly to 'Online Age' but it would be productive for centres to consider this theme in relation to regulation and to broader socio-political questions about the role of media in public life, arguably never more prominent in current affairs and attendant discussions in the public sphere.

General Advice to Centres

This advice is repeated from previous series.

Support candidates to prepare different approaches to 1(a) and 1(b) – process and decisions for 1(a), conceptual textual analysis from a critical distance for 1(b).

Ensure that candidates are able to make use of contemporary media examples for the majority of their answer in section B. Theory from any time is appropriate, but media examples and case studies should be **mainly from the five years preceding the examination**.

Enable candidates to engage with a range of theoretical, academic and research perspectives for whichever theme is addressed – there is an abundance of media theory applicable to ALL themes, including media in the online age and media regulation.

Develop time management skills for exam preparation, particularly for section 1.

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